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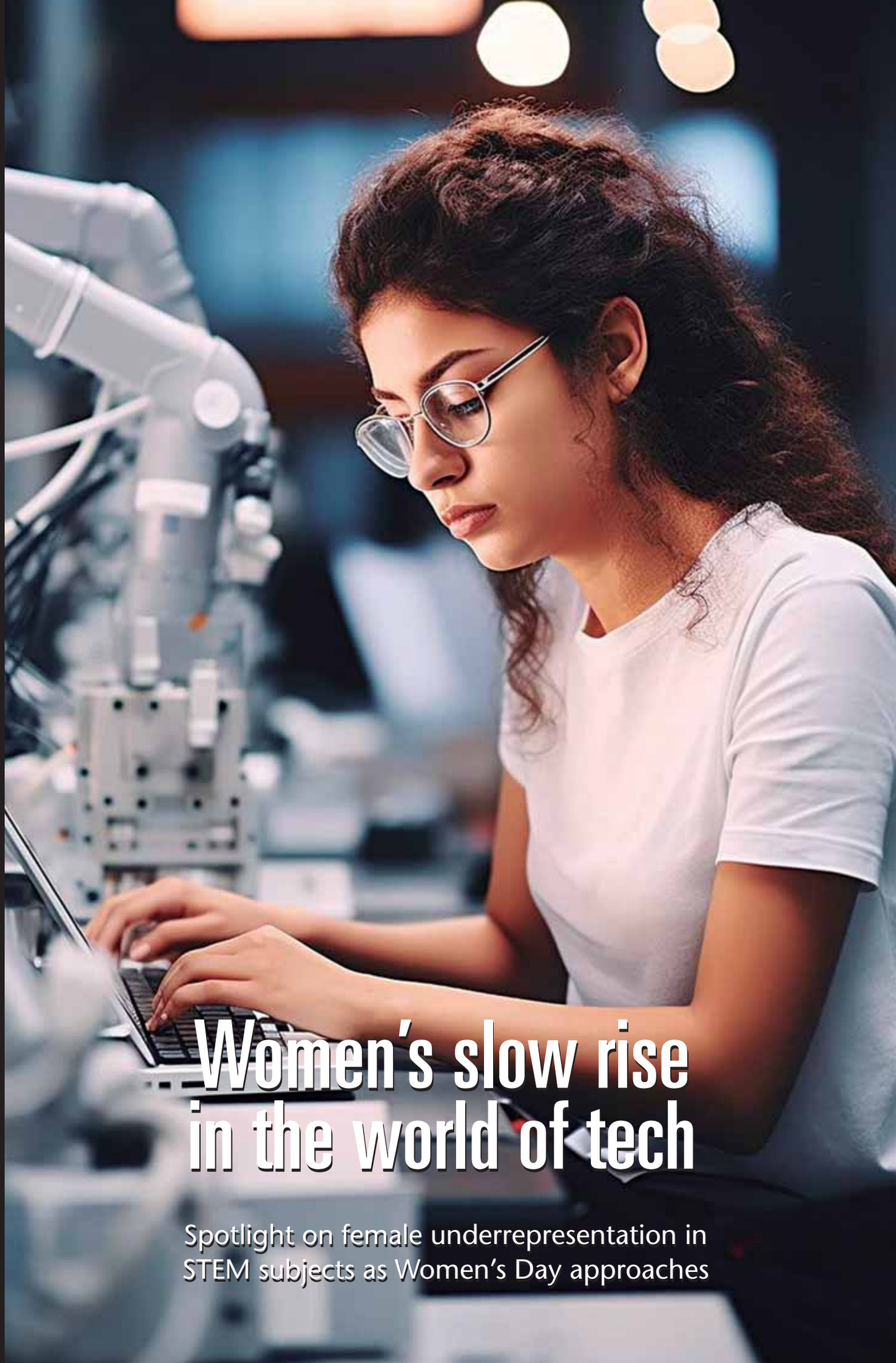

Women's slow rise in the world of tech

Spotlight on female underrepresentation in STEM subjects as Women's Day approaches

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FROM THE EDITOR

MARCELA TOPOR
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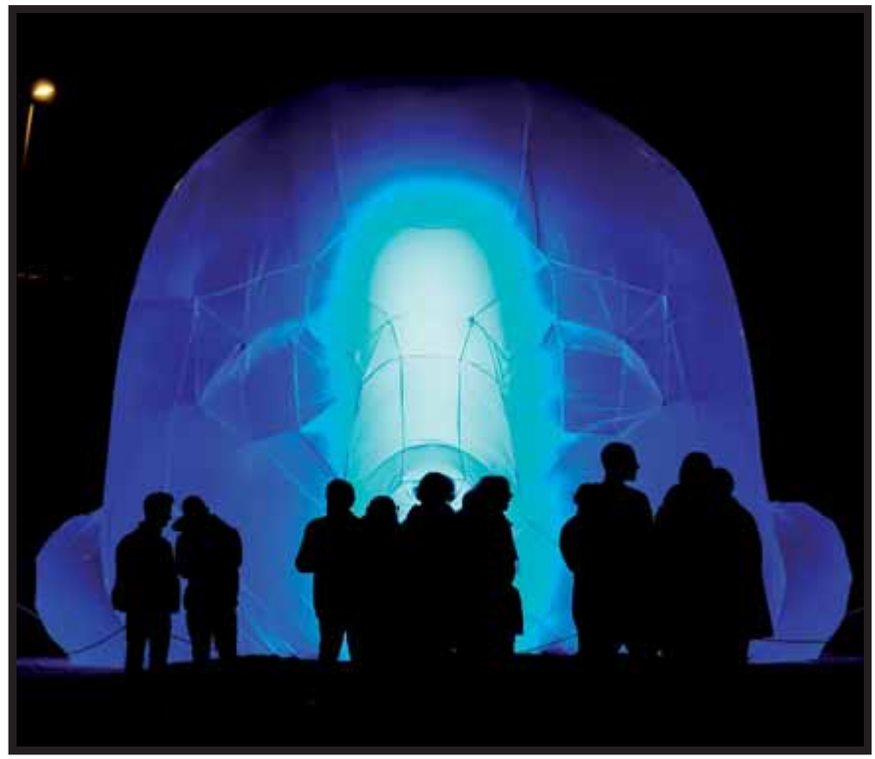
More women in STEM

The celebration of International Women's Day on March 8 is an opportunity for society to review what progress has been made and what problems still remain on the path to full equality between women and men. Even as some advances have been made in recent decades, new difficulties are also being identified and more problems appear where, theoretically, everyone agrees on the solutions. The world to come will not be equal if we only strive for equality in rhetorical terms or in the social roles we know today. Delving into it a little further, we see an obvious risk in there being too great a gap between men and women in the main careers and jobs in the economic and industrial sectors, which will be much more powerful in the near future than at present. The well-known STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) sectors, have reversed the positive trend that had been generated in other careers such as medicine. That is, the STEM field is failing to attract female talent and technical careers still have a great lack of women. If this anomaly is not corrected, if more technical and scientific vocations are not awakened among girls, the world will continue to speak in male terms. The field of technology is, right now, much more male-dominated than other fields, where the presence of women was anecdotal just a few decades ago. Greater efforts should be made in this regard, especially taking into account that the EU will have serious difficulties finding European labour to cover all the job demands that will be generated by the technological sector in the coming years. Some countries detected the trend years ago and corrected it in time; here in Catalonia, we have to take note of it and start taking action before it is too late. To start with, experts say, it is fundamental to connect women with STEM subjects from the very first years of their school life and empower women to thrive professionally, but also to enhance diversity and innovation within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, driving broader economic growth and prosperity. For further information, check out our feature in this month's issue (pages 10-15).

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

ENRIC FONTCUBERTA Barcelona - 03-02-2024



The 13th edition of the BCN Light Festival saw 40 installations around the Poblenou neighbourhood.

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

THE FUTURE OF THE PRINTED PRESS AND REFLECTIONS ON A NEW BOOK

JOAN VALL CLARA

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF EL PUNT AVUI NEWSPAPER

"We have to see the replacement of paper in the coming years as an opportunity for independent journalism and for the Catalan language"

MIQUEL BERGA

ENGLISH LITERATURE LECTURER AT POMPEU FABRA UNIVERSITY

"We all come from a lost place [about his new book 'A Foreign Country']"

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For a long while, Nils Melzer, the UN special rapporteur on torture, had doubts about the Australian Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, suspecting that he was little more than a 'shady hacker'. The 2010 rape allegations made by two Swedish women didn't do much for his image, either. So Melzer refused him UN protection when requested to do so by Assange's legal team in 2018. They petitioned Melzer again in 2019 and this time round he decided to take a closer look; the look turned into a two year investigation, the (devastating) results of which have been published in Melzer's recent book 'The Trial of Julian Assange'. Melzer reminds us that in 2006, Wikileaks started by exposing corruption in Kenya; the banning of Red Cross delegates in Guantánamo; and by detailing thousands of cases of war crimes committed in Iraq and Afghanistan by western troops, including a video taken from an Apache helicopter, which showed the crew having a good laugh as they killed two Reuters reporters and a dozen unarmed Iraqi civilians. As for the rape allegations, Melzer found that the two Swedish women involved, with whom Assange had had brief affairs, went to the police to oblige him to get an HIV test, but the Swedish police seem to have assumed (or decided) that this was an accusation of rape. Over the next ten years, the police investigation never went beyond the preliminary stage (i.e. Assange was never charged) and several prosecutors dropped the case, which was picked up by others who were also unable to find enough evidence to prosecute. Assange left for Britain, only for the Swedish government to demand his extradition. Fearing, reasonably, that once extradited he would be whisked off to a US waiting for him with open jaws, Assange sought refuge in the Ecuadorean Embassy in 2012. Wikileaks continued to publish damning documents, this time on Syria's Assad regime and the western companies that were doing business with it; even more damningly, in 2017 it published 'Vault 7': nearly 9,000 CIA files revealing that the Agency had been practising covert mass surveillance on US citizens and European leaders. The CIA's director classified Assange as the leader of a 'non-state hostile intelligence service' and planned to kidnap or murder him (according to 8 of the 30 officials in on the plot, which was abandoned when White House lawyers questioned its 'legality'). When the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* published the same CIA documents, Trump decided to prosecute Assange alone. In 2019, the Ecuadoreans handed Assange over to the London police, having confiscated his razor and forbidden him from cutting his hair 3 months earlier. He looked terrible (that was the idea). What's more, it has now been conclusively proven that Assange redacted material from his documents that could have put people in danger: contrary to persistent rumours, no one has been injured or killed because of Wikileaks. At his extradition hearings in the UK in 2020, Assange was (unlawfully) placed in a glass cage which made it impossible to confer with his counsel. If extradited, he will be jailed for life, accused of being a terrorist and a spy. In Catalonia, the Assange case is being followed closely: here too, hundreds of people - political leaders included - have been illegally spied upon, and hundreds more are being accused of terrorism for no demonstrable reason. If the British extradite Assange, it will give a green light to liberal democracies everywhere to instantly get shot of anyone who they consider to be a pain in their backsides. And free speech be damned.

A London protest in support of Assange / EFE

THE CIA'S DIRECTOR CLASSIFIED ASSANGE AS THE LEADER OF A 'NON-STATE HOSTILE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE'
HERE TOO, HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ILLEGALLY SPIED UPON

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A busy market stall. / QUIM PUIG

MARKET DAY

HEADING FOR THE HILLS

MARTIN KIRBY
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You need to park your impatience, heed the goodness.

This is going to take time. Shopping in our mountain town on market day is enriched with life from the tranquil villages of The Priorat. Precious few people are in a hurry. It is unwise to make plans or clock-watch. Your blood pressure could turn you puce.

There is no bustle, just a subtle heightening of being, from the catch-up chatter in cafes to the queues in the banks, bakeries and butchers.

Half the car park is swallowed for a morning, as stalls fill the void and a steady flow of folk consider the wares and the pears, the prices and the plethora of sustenance on offer for the week ahead.

It is Catalan. It is multicultural. It is colour, it is weekly reunions and the aroma of coffee. Time, place and pace are the bond. Just as vitally it is a boost for local businesses without which we would be all the poorer.

If we are calm and have the time it is good to be there, to abandon agenda and switch off from the wider world to the one that matters most. I may even attempt it on my own, a man with a list, but this can, foolishly, add an irrepressible seed of urgency. In trying not to make a mistake or forget something I am inclined to forget the most important aspect of all.

I was surprised on a recent solo foray to see just one elderly woman being served in our butchers. So I veered in, feeling fortunate. I should have put two and two together. She was not from the town and it dawned on me almost immediately that this was going to be a long haul. Bowed like a Catalan staircase and well beyond 80 years, she was leaning on the counter and watching like a hawk as a chicken was quartered. She shuffled sideways and pointed out her next order. It is a long counter. I lost count of the shuffles. More people flowed in, some settling on the bench by the side window for a natter. The woman's stockpiling of her freezer amounted, finally, to three bulging shopping bags, clearly far more than she could carry.

As several of us twitched as to how we could help, the door opened and her husband called warmly to her and laboured in, leaning heavily on a walking stick. We all twitched again. The man nearest to the couple offered to help but the indefatigable husband was having none of it. Somehow they waddled out into the street and round the corner, weighed with half the fare from the shop.

IT IS A BOOST FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES WITHOUT WHICH WE WOULD BE ALL THE POORER

The warmth and smiles they generated in that moment spoke of the spirit and sustaining essence, the ribbon of continuity, that is market day.

Steady as you go. Keep on keeping on.

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In the news

WHAT HAPPENED IN FEBRUARY

Barcelona province registers 26m tourists in 2023

The Barcelona Tourism Observatory calculates that 26 million tourists visited the province of Barcelona in 2023, some 12% more than the previous year. In all, 99 million overnight stays were registered and a direct economic impact of €12.4 billion, 21% more than the year before. Almost 16 million of the visitors to Barcelona province last year stayed in the Catalan capital.

Sant Pau first to implant world's smallest pacemaker

Barcelona's Sant Pau hospital became the first in Europe to implant the world's smallest pacemaker. The new devices lasts an average of 17 years, 40% more than its predecessors. The new pacemakers include advanced algorithms that automatically coordinate the activity of the heart's upper and lower chambers, and also allow the medical team to control the device remotely.

Manresa opens the Baroque Museum of Catalonia

Manresa opened the Baroque Museum of Catalonia in the renovated former Sant Ignasi school. The museum opens with 675 square metres of exhibition space, which will later double. The new museum hosts 182 pieces of Catalan Baroque by such prominent authors of the period as Antoni Viladomat Manalt, Joaquim Juncosa, Francesc Tramulles Roig and Francesc Pla.

2.3 million calls to 112 emergency number in 2023

In 2023, the 112 emergency telephone number received a total of 2,319,974 calls, 3.8% more than the 2,234,855 calls received in 2022. The emergency calls required assistance from one of the emergency services, such as the police, the fire brigade, medical services or Civil Protection. The majority of calls (820,140) were related to security, followed by health care (660,737).

MWC returns to Barcelona with focus on AI and 5G

The Mobile World Congress (MWC) returned to Barcelona with over 2,400 exhibitors showing off their latest tech products, especially innovations in AI and 5G connectivity.

Farmers block roads with tractors in protests calling for reforms

Farmers blocked roads all over Catalonia in protests calling for reforms in the sector, such as a reduction in paperwork and action against unfair competition from abroad.

What the foreign press says about Catalonia

npr

Alves found guilty of rape

Dani Alves, one of the most successful soccer players of his generation, was found guilty of raping a woman in a Barcelona nightclub and sentenced to four years and six months in prison. The former Barcelona right back was convicted in Spain under a new sexual liberty law that emphasizes the victim's lack of consent as key to determining sex crimes. A three-judge panel at the Barcelona court convicted the 40-year-old Alves of sexual assault for the incident in 2022. The court ordered Alves to pay 150,000 euros ($162,000) in compensation to the victim, banned him from approaching the victim's home or place of work, and from communicating with her by any means for nine years. Feb 22

ALJAZEERA

Worst drought sparks fears

After three years without sustained rainfall, emergency measures have been brought in, which include a ban on refilling swimming pools in hotels or campsites. If the heavens do not open soon, Spain may order two ships per day to carry water from Valencia to Barcelona, port authorities said. Tourists visiting Catalonia – Spain's most popular tourist region, which attracted 18 million visitors last year – face the prospect of swimming pool closures. The only exception will be swimming pools used for medical reasons. With the lucrative summer season ahead, campsites are exploring ways to use seawater in pools. One option could be bringing seawater to top up pools, but this is expensive. Feb 6

POLITICO

Migration takes center stage

In Catalonia, the issue of independence has hogged the political limelight for years. Now the focus is shifting to immigration. The emergence of a new far-right, pro-independence and anti-migrant party, plus the fallout from Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's deal with the pro-independence Junts party in order to stay in power, have resulted in a hardening of language of migration which mirrors that seen elsewhere across the bloc. In January, Junts announced it had won concessions from the Spanish government that would give the region control of its "migratory flows". Details remain hazy, but it came as the right-of-center Junts has been hardening its stance on the issue. Feb 12

Faces in the news

Sylvia Lagarda-Mata
Writer

Lagarda-Mata won the second edition of the Barcelona Santa Eulàlia Novel Prize with 'Ves de mort als Encants Vells', a historical thriller set in the Catalan capital in 1840. The prize is endowed with €25,000.

J. A. Bayona
Filmmaker

Bayona's film, The Society of the Snow, won best picture and director at Spain's Academy Goya Awards. The director won 12 awards, the third-highest count in the Goya's 40-year history.

Elena Martín
Director and actress

The director and actress was the big winner in the Gaudí Awards, the Catalan version of the Oscars, with her second film, 'Creatura', taking six prizes, including Best Film and Best Director.

Josep Maria Puig
Entrepreneur

The founder of Flamagás, the makers of the famous Clipper lighters, died aged 92. He was also the last living representative of the second generation of the family that owns the Puig perfumery group.

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THE CULTURAL TIGHTROPE
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Time for a rant by a confused and annoyed *guiri* who has lived here for almost 30 years and still runs into problems with the way things are done. Even though, in theory, I speak and understand Catalan very well.

The five years on my flat rental contract are up. I'm not going anywhere, and the landlord can have no complaints about my tenancy, as far as I'm aware. So time for the two parties to renew the contract, right? With a slight adjustment in rental price to account for inflation, even though anyone renting a flat these days is feeling the financial heat at least as much as any landlord when it comes to the unbearable rise in the price of living, right? Wrong and wrong again. And the new housing rental law passed in May 2023 will protect me as the tenant against any furtive attempts to overcharge me by the always honest and scrupulous estate agent, right? Wrong a third time.

I received a "burofax" – a registered fax used in this part of the world to mean its receipt is documented – from my charming estate agent two months before the expiry of my old contract explaining that I would have to renounce that one and sign a new one prior to said expiry (I'm starting to use slightly more formal English here to get you in the mood for what's coming…), and that this would involve me paying the estate agent a contract signing fee made expressly illegal by the aforementioned new law (I've added that last part... they didn't seem to know it was illegal when they sent it to me, poor things must be overrun with work to have missed all these new laws forbidding them from ripping off tenants). And also that my deposit would be returned to me as I was signing a new contract, and the new deposit charged according to the new rental price, which had risen by precisely 4.13%.

A woman passing an estate agent's window. / JUANMA RAMOS

"SOMEWHERE A LANDLORD'S LAUGHING TILL HE WETS HIS PANTS"

When I pointed out, quoting the new law verbatim, that a) the cost of the new contract now legally fell upon the landlord, not the tenant, so would they be so kind as to please remove that from the bill? and b) to my understanding, there was a limit of 3% rise in rental prices in 2024, I was informed in no uncertain terms (nothing polite about the reply, and no sign of an apology for trying to rip me off to the tune of 600-odd euros), that the item had (reluctantly, I assume) now been removed from the bill, but that because it was a new contract the price rise was legal. Having consulted various contacts in the real estate business and my own "gestor", I was told that the requirement to sign a new contract seemed shady at best, and possibly illegal, but that also I was risking being left on the street come the end of my contract given the current demand for flats in Barcelona. So I went ahead and agreed to the price hike and thanked them wholeheartedly for not charging me the illegal amount they had originally added to my bill.

On we go. After receiving the draft contract and reading a very confusing, to me at least, clause of how much I had to pay my landlord if I left my flat within a year of signing, I asked the agent exactly how much this compensation would amount to, providing an example. I received a curt emailed response implying that I was asking a lot of questions about this contract and why didn't I just sign it? In addition, there was this: "the owner wants to make sure that the tenant stays at least one year and does not vacate the flat earlier". Well, my heart goes out to landlords in these hard times.

Imagine if for some reason through no fault of my own I am forced to leave the flat, or I actually have the audacity to leave of my own volition, before a year is up. Then I have to pay compensation to the moneybags landlord who is raking it in month after month. Having checked the legality of the clause and being told it was now "standard procedure", I duly signed. As Lou Reed sang on the track Dirty Blvd from his 1989 New York album, "Somewhere a landlord's laughing till he wets his pants".

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www.cataloniatoday.cat/article/2391350

MADRID'S SPECIAL TRIBUNALS FOR INTREPID CATALANS

TRIBUNE
ORIOL MARTINEZ ALÒS-MONER
Economist and member of the Economy Section of the Catalan National Assembly

That totalitarian regimes do not like dissent may seem an understatement. Take Daniel Ortega and his extended family's brutal rule over Nicaraguans. Just recently, ending 2023, the country's police accused Karen Celebertti, organiser of the local franchise of Miss Universe to non-other than terrorism. The real reason had been the crowds throughout the country celebrating the recent coronation of Sheynnis Palacios, a compatriot with open sympathies to the opposition. Ms Celebertti's husband and son were arrested, while she was outlawed from her country.

Such abuse is expected in places such as Russia, the Arab world, or in China. It is being well reported how Beijing is subduing Hong Kong's democratic stance, in a slow but relentless course, more notable since the Umbrella movement of 2014. Within this context, also late in 2023, a media tycoon, Jimmy Lai, was held in court after three years of detention, accused of colluding with foreign forces, after articles appeared in his popular tabloid Apple Daily. Mr Lai, who was already sentenced to almost six years in jail for fraud in 2022 – a verdict denounced by human-rights groups – may now face a life behind bars.

One regards the West as being free from lawfare, with no few instances by which citizens have been granted protection: prosecutors targetting real crimes, a judiciary insulated from political pressure, a free media eager to denounce oppression, or a parliament that cares that the democratic game is alive and kicking. Regrettably, as recently denounced in this column by Mr Freixenet, in one "western" country these levers melt; at least when those facing the law are Catalan independence supporters (an "Easy to Identify Group", denomination used by the Court of Justice of the EU).

In a recent publication, Messrs. Ros and Llucià, from "Maspons i Anglesells" (an association that seeks to recover Catalan civic law, one of the oldest in Europe) has exposed the lawfare in the case of Ms Laura Borràs, president of Catalonia's Parliament, and convicted of mismanagement of public funds in March 2023. As with other pro-independence figures, before the formal trial Ms Borràs was publicly condemned by the media and political parties, both looking for fresh blood. In what turned into a de facto public trial that lasted for months, a narrative was built towards only one possible verdict, guilty.

Experts reported how Ms Borràs had always acted within public procurement law, that works were awarded according to the then valid legislation, that no one from the administration's side took any illicit money, and, finally, that the works were real and followed the tender's requirements - easy to attest to as they are public websites. This notwithstanding, Ms Borràs was sentenced to 4.5 years of prison, and 13 years' disqualification from public office - curiously (or not) the same sentence as the organisers of the Catalan independence referendum of October 1, 2017. Intriguingly, the same tribunal (the Catalonia's Tribunal of Justice), considering the sentence inflated, proposed a partial pardon to shorten it to below two years to avoid prison. But the goal of the case was met: that of barring her from public office.

Mr Damià del Clot has dedicated a book to the matter: "The strategy of repression against the Catalan independence movement", in which he writes that "Franco already used the law to annihilate political dissidence... Today lawfare is a strategy that requires the complicity of the administration, the media, as well as the judiciary and, above all, the so-called deep state. This is only possible by using the penal code from a friend-enemy perspective".

Laura Borràs talking to the press. ACN

The slow awakening of female talent in technical subjects

ANNA PINTER
leconomic.cat

With Women's Day on March 9 due to celebrate the progress made in gender equality, **the percentage of women choosing to study science and technology subjects is still not rising fast enough** to close the gap with men

A female student at the Polytechnic University of Catalo

As International Women's Day approaches on March 8 to celebrate the advances that society has made in recent times to achieve greater parity between the sexes, some areas still lag behind. A key example is that the rise in the number of women choosing technological and scientific careers continues to rise at a very slow pace. Despite all the efforts and initiatives made in the private and public spheres to get more women into these subjects, there is still a lot of work to be done. In Catalonia, only 32% of students doing STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) at university are women.

Nevertheless, after years of stagnation, and even at times regression, since the 2016/17 academic year the number of women in STEM subjects has grown overall, albeit only slightly. In absolute terms, the number of female students went from 16,000 in STEM degrees in the 2016/17 academic year to 18,000 in the 2022/23 academic year (for men, the numbers were 53,000 and 57,000, respectively).

However, if we look at the percentage of female students in certain STEM subjects, such as computer science (16%), mathematics (25%), automotive (5%) and telecommunications (13%), the room for improvement in making up ground is huge.

The arguments for why it is urgent to close the gap between the sexes in studying STEM subjects are several. First, because the lack of vocation for technical subjects among young women endangers their work prospects in an increasingly technological world; secondly, because diversity within business organisations makes them more profitable, and, furthermore, because without women in the professions in which the products and services of the future are designed and branded, gender biases will persist that can exclude half of the population.

"The fact that the degree subjects with the best job prospects and the best remuneration in the labour market are the ones with the most female underrepresentation is unfair and must be reversed," believes Josefina Antonijuan, vice-rector of social responsibility and equality at Catalonia's Polytechnic University (UPC), the country's leading public university in the fields of architecture, engineering, science and technology.

Meanwhile, the president of the Association of Industrial Engineers of Catalonia, Maria Salamero, points out that the diversity of views in teams allows companies, administrations and any type of organisation to make better decisions, "and not only diversity of gender but also of age, abilities, and so on," she says. In fact, the lack of diverse viewpoints has for years contributed to the shortcomings of products, such as the design of car seat belts that do not take into account pregnant women or electronic devices to monitor the user's state of health that do not include female-specific variables.

It was not until last year that the Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute developed the first female crash test dummy ever in history. Until now, no one had taken into account that women are generally shorter than men and that their muscles, hips and torso are different. "If there are no women in the automotive sector, there won't be anyone to think about how women drive," adds Salamero.

The development of artificial intelligence also poses a challenge: if the data used comes from very masculinised environments, it will be reflected in the databases which "will

32%
of university students in STEM degree subjects are women

nia. UPC

be male-oriented and will perpetuate gender bias," argues Antonijuan.

The low presence of women in science and tech careers from which new technology flows reached a turning point in 2018, when different initiatives began to emerge to counter this deficit. The STEM Women Congress is a good example, under journalist Eva Díaz and executive in the technological business world Mar Porras, who decided in 2019 to launch an event to encourage more women to join the STEM sector. The aspiration is to give visibility and promote female talent in the STEM sphere.

Mireia Usart, Serra Húnter lecturer in educational research and a researcher in educational technology, recently ran a study on the lack of female talent to be found in STEM subjects. The conclusion of the analysis was that achieving parity in these disciplines is a slow process that is also due to multiple factors. One is the fact that the initiatives that have been carried out so far have targeted young women who are already persuaded and have not been wide enough to bring in new students. "It is very difficult to convince those who are not at all attracted to this world, because from the outside it looks to them to be very masculinised," says Usart, who gives the example of video games and robotics, which continue to be mostly linked to combat scenarios, "a theme that arouses little interest among girls," adds Usart.

The fact is that the stereotypes linked to these professions begin to be absorbed at a very early age. There are studies that show that by the age of six girls have already internalised that scientist, computer scientist or engineer are male professions, and cultural pressure continues to consolidate these attitudes until it's time for them to choose what they want to be when they grow up.

"WITH NO WOMEN IN THE AUTOMOTIVE SECTOR, THERE WON'T BE ANYONE TO THINK ABOUT HOW WOMEN DRIVE"

Cultural pressure

From the types of toys offered to them, to how and who teaches them technical subjects, to how the purpose of degree courses are presented to them, all help create a world view in girls that more often pushes them towards training options linked to the arts, the humanities, the caring profession, and so on. Some 81% of people enrolled in the field of education are women; 83%, in nursing; 72%, in medicine, and 77%, in languages. "There are some socio-cultural factors, some individual factors of each person, as well as institutional and educational policy factors that are beginning to be detected in schools, even in nursery schools, and which condition us from an early age," explains Porras, president of the STEM Women Congress.

However, until only recently, most of the actions and initiatives that had been launched to attract female students to STEM

subjects have focused on high school students, when it is already too late.

There is another limiting aspect linked to cultural pressure: self-perception. From the age of six, a girl already begins to believe that she is less capable than a boy in terms of her skills. This is what a study published by Science magazine finds, warning that from their first years of life, girls already tend to discount those activities that are considered to be for "very intelligent" children. This ends up having a direct impact on their choice of academic and professional future.

There is overwhelming unanimity among all the experts consulted on the fact that the lack of role models is a key cause of the low participation of girls in STEM subjects. Mireia Usart participates in the digital transformation of schools. She says that while 90% of teachers are women, 99% of those responsible for ICT (information and communications technology) in primary schools are men. And if we look at the job market, only 25% of all technical professionals in ICT sector companies in Catalonia are women, according to data from the DonaTIC Barometer study, which also found that female talent accounted for just 37% of new tech hires and 35% of internal promotions in the tech industry in 2021.

"IT HAS BECOME NORMAL FOR GIRLS TO PLAY FOOTBALL. THE SAME LOGIC SHOULD BE FOLLOWED IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY"

Porras sees re-skilling as a possible solution: "The disciplines that are growing have the advantage that they are multidisciplinary. I'd tell women that they have the opportunity to grow in economically better settled careers, to be more independent and to be models for the new generations."

"With football it has become normal for girls to play the sport and there are many more female teams. Well, in science and technology, the same logic should be followed", explains Zoila Babot, head of communication at the Barcelona Institute of Science and Technology (BIST), which is made up of seven research centres and heads the 100tifiques programme, a project that aims to highlight the relevance and strategic role of women in science and technology. The initiative takes women working in these fields into schools so that girls see from a young age that these are professions in which women can also thrive.

LILIANA ARROYO MOLINER

GENERAL DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL SOCIETY

"Using role models from the 19th century does not help"

Liliana Arroyo. JUANMA RAMOS

Liliana Arroyo Moliner, the head of Digital Society, holds a degree in sociology from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), a PhD in sociology from the University of Barcelona (UB) and is a specialist in digital social innovation. She has been responsible for innovation in the Digital Technology Societies area of the i2Cat Foundation and researcher at the Institute for Social Innovation (Esade).

What do you think makes girls shy away from STEM vocations?

There are multiple reasons. The first is the number of gender biases around these professional profiles. Girls grow up with the burden of "impostor syndrome", a problem of lack of confidence in occupying traditionally male positions. And then there's a lack of role models, both male and female. That's key. We find that when a girl has a role model at home, she's much more likely to study a career related to the technical field. Even if he's the father; he doesn't have to be a female role model. Then there's the snowball effect.

Is there a clear consensus that role models are needed?

Yes, but we must be careful with them, because lately some roles have reappeared that may not help, such as 19th-century figures or women who have had to leave their lives to one side or have a series of burdens associated with working in the world of technology. This does no good to the cause. And how we explain these careers is especially critical. What interests girls is very different from what interests boys, and we must know how to adapt so that what we're proposing is understood.

In what way?

Boys and girls have a very different approach when choosing a career. In general terms, the girls' vocation is to improve the lives of those close to them, and for boys it's generally enough to think it's a successful job opportunity. They're much more instrumental.

So the key here is how we sell these careers?

That's very important. Here at Digital Society we've contributed to a campaign to create women scientist role models, who explain their careers from a different point of view. For example, a woman who studied computer science because she wanted to cure cancer, and explained that being a computer engineer gave her a knowledge of data to help create a tool to fight this disease.

So the challenge is how to talk about technology?

Yes, exactly. We should talk about technology not as a solution, not as an end in itself, because that's a very short path, but as a means to achieve other things, because this also implies a much more inclusive and fair vision.

Participants on one of the programmes. ORIOL DURAN

Aquí STEAM UPC

Nearly 60 schools have already taken part in the Aquí STEAM UPC programme, run by the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC) since 2019 with the aim of promoting scientific and technological vocations among primary school students.

Participating teachers receive a training workshop aimed at introducing the gender perspective into the classroom, as well as a specific workshop on teaching ideas for incorporating STEM activities in schools.

Women engineers return to school to be seen

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Universities, professional associations and companies are trying to **bring women scientists, technologists and engineers closer to the world of education**

What is the day-to-day life of a woman scientist like? And the working day of a woman researcher? The answers to these and many other questions can be found on a University of Barcelona (UB) programme aimed at bringing visibility to the everyday life of women scientists. It is one of the different programmes currently being implemented to encourage more girls to opt for STEM vocations (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

The UB programme seeks to show that many jobs still associated with the male-dominated world are now being done by women. "The ultimate goal is for the message to reach girls and young women to promote scientific vocations and break myths about the world of research," according to the programme organisers.

Some of these working scientists have joined the initiative *100tífiques*, a community of more than 700 women volunteers who visit more than 800 schools throughout the country. These women, who work in public institutions and private companies, are sharing information about their life experience and professional careers "so that girls know they can become whatever they want in the future," explains Zoila Babot, leader of the initiative.

In 2015, the Catalan government organised the first DonaTIC awards, which have a dual objective: to recognise and make visible the role of women in the professional, business and academic world of new technologies, and to provide role models to girls who are unsure about whether or not to dedicate themselves to science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines in the future.

The DonaTIC awards have been one of the outstanding initiatives of the government's DonaTIC plan, which aims to break the existing glass ceiling in the technology sector regarding the presence of women and "promote their participation and empowerment in the construction of the digital society using the criteria of equality", according to the programme notes.

The Association of Industrial Engineers of Catalonia has also set its sights on girls breaking the glass ceiling in their profession. They have recently published the illustrated story, The Magic of Engineering, which explains what engineers are and what they do for society. "To encourage them to move towards a magical profession such as engineering," says Maria Salamero, president of the association. According to the Engineering Observatory, Spain will need more than 200,000 engineers over the next 10 years to cover all the needs of the business and technological ecosystem.

A couple of years ago, the University of Lleida (UdL) also launched a new STEM programme for students of the primary education degree.

Lluís Rovira. JUANMA RAMOS

LLUÍS ROVIRA CERCA INSTITUTION DIRECTOR

"It can't be the case that some centres haven't advanced in 10 years"

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Lluís Rovira (Girona, 1968) has a doctorate in biology and is a specialist in the analysis and management of science. Since 2011, Rovira has managed the Institution of Research Centres of Catalonia (Cerca), which is to say, the service of the Catalan government that provides support to the country's main research centres and helps them carry out their activities, but also evaluates them at different levels.

What is being done to make up for the lack of women in managerial positions in science?

We detected the problem some 10 years ago, when we saw that there was only one woman manager of a research centre. This was a dramatic and outrageous situation. So as a result, we drew up the first gender plan in research, which inspired the centres that work with us to each make their own gender plan. Now the number of women in leadership positions in centres is still relatively low, but we have managed to improve the situation somewhat.

How did you improve the situation?

We started with the external scientific committees, because they are a mirror for our community of researchers. It is a group of international experts, the leaders of their respective research areas, who advise the centres on scientific issues. At that time, they were all trained by men, but we got involved and that has now changed. They are now balanced between men and women or are quickly on the way to becoming so. Making an impact here has been easy because the designation goes through the centres' boards of trustees, where we have a voice and a vote and we have rejected many proposals due to a lack of balance.

Some centres are still heavily dominated by men. Why haven't they moved forward?

They argue that in their discipline it is very difficult to do so because it is a very masculinised field of study. And that's true, but it can't be the case that there are centres that have not moved ahead in 10 years. There are ways to improve the situation, and they must act. Talent is split between men and women, and if you only have men, you give up on a very valuable part of the country's resources.

Is positive discrimination necessary?

We have never applied it although we are aware that some centres are doing it. It is the strongest measure you can take, because you stop taking men into account. We have seen that in cases in which the candidates are perfectly matched, then the woman is chosen. But you rarely find such an equal tie in a selection process, so it is not a very effective measure.

Are you optimistic about the future?

I think the transition can be accelerated. We started the measures without the community accompanying us or taking it seriously. Now it's different, awareness has grown much more.

Do you think that female leadership can bring a different way of approaching science?

Yes, my experience is that male managers are often authoritarian and tend to have strong egos, although you also find nice ones who you can talk to normally. On the other hand, with women the profile is very different: it is usually management based on listening and dialogue. They tend to be facilitators, and this is priceless in management positions. I don't know if it is representative or not, but in the six cases we have, we see that women have a different style.

MARINA MOSQUERA IPHES DIRECTOR

"Social dynamics are the slowest to change"

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Professor Marina Mosquera recently became the first woman to manage the Catalan Institute of Human Paleoecology and Social Evolution (Iphes).

You are only the sixth woman to head one of the 41 Cerca centres.

It's a terrible ratio. There are many women who enter the field but very few of them reach the highest positions.

Have you ever felt that your status as a woman was a burden?

No, I was lucky enough to be part of a working group led by Eudald Carbonell, in which there was no masculine atmosphere or discrimination. But it's true that social dynamics are the slowest to change and despite not feeling discriminated against, even in the groups most favourable to equality abnormal situations still occur.

So what are the pending issues?

Positions of responsibility. But in order to reach equality of numbers, we must remember that we are talking about a dynamic that dominates the entire social environment, which traditionally does not empower women so that they can achieve roles of responsibility.

MARGA NADAL IDIBGI DIRECTOR

"We must not lead by quota but by being better"

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Biology PhD Marga Nadal has been at the head of the Biomedical Research Institute of Girona for three years.

Is it normal for there to be only six women directors out of 41 centres ?

No, the problem is that until now it was. Fortunately, I think it is being remedied little by little.

Have you experienced or seen any examples of discrimination?

There are some environments that you find yourself in as a director – events, commissions, meetings – that have always been handled by men and that in some cases are still horribly sexist. Now we are the ones who will have to change these dynamics.

What are the most appropriate measures to do this?

One is to make women see that not only can they do it, but that they must do it.

Are we on the right track?

I'm optimistic and I think we'll get there. But we must not lead because of quotas, but because we are doing the same or better than the other people who have applied.

Paretdelgada gathering in the 1960s. / OLLA SARDANISTA GERMANOR

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A new era for the sardana?

The popularity of the song 'Coti x Coti' has shaken up the world of **the traditional dance as it looks to find a place in today's society**

The Aplec de Paretdelgada, in La Selva del Camp, has not taken place since 1964. The Aplec, or gathering, was a celebration of the traditional Catalan dance known as the *sardana*, but the Franco regime also saw it as a focus of resistance and eventually banned it.

"The Paretdelgada gatherings were not only about the sardana, they were also an escape valve and a bubble of opposition to Francoism," says Roser Vallverdú, head of the Germanor sardana group, the heir to the group that hosted the legendary gatherings in La Selva del Camp from 1959 to 1964. They have now restored the annual event, with the first new edition due to take place on May 5.

What is the status of the sardana tradition today? Of its three main aspects – music, dance and as a symbol of Catalan identity – the music and dance aspects are today more prominent than the other. "We find ourselves at a time when our culture is again under threat," laments Vallverdú, who believes young people are the key to keeping the sardana alive.

'Som Sardana'

According to the organisation representing the world of the sardana under the new brand 'Som Sardana' (We are Sardana), the Sardanista Confederation of Catalonia, the Paretdelgada gatherings must be understood in the political and cultural context of the time. "Today no one doubts that the sardana is an identity symbol of Catalan culture; it is more relevant than ever," says Som Sardana spokesperson Joan Pons. In December, the confederation unveiled 'Som Sardana' with the aim of reaching more people: "We have to reach out to future enthusiasts. The sardana is heard, danced, experienced, and we must communicate what it means to be in the sardana world," says Pons. The appeal to young people is key: "We want to show that the sardana is exciting and can be attractive to young people," he adds.

For Pons, the vitality of the sardana in the 21st century is unquestionable: "It is more relevant than ever, not least because of the phenomenon Coti x Coti [the popular song by The Tyets music group] but also because the sardana world is still alive and organises gatherings, competitions, dances and courses." In the last year the number of courses has almost doubled.

Regarding the participation of young people, Pons believes "we must avoid making generalisations about how young people have no interest in the sardana, because it is not true." Yet the spokesman admits that "what's missing is more knowledge of the sardana and, by implication, of Catalan popular culture. If we think that young people see the sardana as boring and uninspiring, maybe it's because we haven't been able to convey to them well enough what the sardana is."

As for the president of the Germanor group, she wants "more involvement" from the public powers and for broadcasters to cover sardana gatherings, and for music schools to teach the instruments used to make sardana music. One measure that already promotes the sardana is the annual designation of the Capital of the Sardana. Most of last year, the title was held by the town of Sant Cugat del Vallès, and from this February it was taken over by Manresa.

Marc Timón, in a promotional image.. M. T.

MARC TIMÓN COMPOSER AND CONDUCTOR

"The sardana is in coma"

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Marc Timón is an award-winning musician who combines composing soundtracks for film and television with creating symphony, pop and electronic music. At the same time he has never left behind the world of the *sardana*. In short, Timón has made an art out of eclecticism. He gave this interview over the phone from Los Angeles, where he was finalising a soundtrack for a Netflix series, before returning to Catalonia to continue touring the country with different musical performances. In this interview, we asked him how he sees the situation of the sardana tradition that he loves so much.

What is the state of health of the sardana in your opinion?

What has happened to the sardana is the same as with our language and other representative elements of Catalan culture: it suffers from our self-loathing. Unfortunately, we are like that and we never seem to know how to care for or love what is ours. The sardana reminds people of the past and it's seen as old-fashioned, which is the result of a problem of self-hatred.

What do you think of the Tyets' Coti x Coti phenomenon?

It's a one-off, anecdotal phenomenon. The proof is that even if people now dance the sardana to this song, when it ends the situation won't have changed and the sardana will continue to suffer. When the fallout from the song is over, I don't see young people calling out: "Let's save the sardana!" The sardana is linked to Catalan language and culture. I think it's great for the group, but it won't really make a difference.

So you don't you think the sardana is experiencing a revival?

No. For it to become really popular, we would have to add reggaeton... It's like my father's cat: to get it to swallow a pill, you have to wrap it in ham. We are only expanding our self-loathing. Even if we dress it up with reggaeton, the sardana is in a coma.

Which does the sardana tradition mean to you?

For me the sardana is the Mediterranean, the smell of pine trees, the blue of the sea, Cap de Creus, the mountains, the spirit of a local summer festival, it's an outburst of our culture, an aligning of our past with the present and the future. It's part of our DNA. It is a lot of things, and modernising it doesn't add anything. Do you need to modernise *pa amb tomaquet* (bread with tomato)? No, right? The sardana as a product is good, the problem – I insist – is one of self-esteem. Look, the Americans have an instrument called the banjo and it isn't the most sophisticated or modern instrument, let's say, but there are musicians from all over the world who play it and love it. Or take reggaeton, which is music with its roots in poor neighbourhoods, where it fills them with cultural pride. It is a super simple musical style that has conquered the world.

So what should be done?

There are many possibilities, perhaps starting with changing the schedules, and instead of doing a sardana at 10 in the morning we could put it 10 in the evening? Let's create pleasant environments for the sardana. Look at the Liceu, they run campaigns you can hear about on the radio or TV to bring opera closer to young people. Unfortunately, the Catalan mainstream does very little to promote the sardana.

Doesn't it help that Unesco recognises it as intangible heritage?

To export something, and for it be heritage, we must first believe in it. We must love what is ours and without any reservations.

Tribute bands: the art of sounding like the originals

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Dozens of **groups that pay tribute to famous bands are having great success** on the live music circuit, accurately reproducing classic songs by the likes of ABBA and Queen

Tribute bands have been around since Elvis revolutionised popular music in the 1950s, and it is unlikely that today there is any major rock or pop group that does not have at least one tribute band, while some legendary outfits like Queen have dozens reproducing their classic songs.

In Catalonia and the rest of Spain, bands that pay tribute to top music groups are on the rise, and they increasingly show superior quality, both in terms of musical ability and stage design and performance. For many capable musicians who find it hard achieving success with their own work, doing covers of other people's hits provides them with a professional outlet that is often well paid.

Such is the case of Jonathan Argüelles, a well-known figure on the Catalan music scene who has done radio and music promotion and served in several music groups (he did an album with Inèdits and two with Junts). In recent years, he has been singing with Sau30, alongside Pep Sala and the rest of the group from Osona. Argüelles is also the drummer in Los 80 Principales, a group that performs versions of 80s classics and has won two Arc live music awards. Nine years ago, some members of this group launched a side project that has exceeded all expectations: ABBA The New Experience.

A tribute band dedicated to the famous Swedish band, ABBA The New Experience is composed of four musicians from Los 80 Principales: Argüelles, guitarist Xavi Lario, keyboardist Marc Ferrando and bassist Rafa Martín, alongside four vocalists, two men and two women, who stand in for the four original ABBA members. Clara Dini is Agnetta, Joaquín Catalán is Björn, Juanma Sánchez is Benny and Ana K. Garcia is Frida. "There's a blonde and a brunette but they aren't copycats: they all have their own artistic personality. We have always been clear that the line between being faithful to the originals and parody can be very thin and we don't want to cross it."

All of the members in the tribute band have serious CVs in the world of music: Rafa Martín, for example, has played with Lluís Llach and Antonio Orozco, while the singers have performed in all kinds of theatre, musical and television productions. But why did they choose to recreate ABBA's music? "If you want to make a living in Catalonia from your own music, the only possibility is to have huge success, and that's not easy," explains Argüelles, who defends the decision to reproduce the Swedish supergroup's music: "ABBA gets the Eurovision label, but that fails to recognise their merit because the group has very good songs, and more than the hits that everyone knows, such as Mamma Mia, Chiquitita and Dancing Queen. Yet they have few songs that are completely unknown to the public. We play between 20 and 22 songs in a show that lasts an hour and three quarters."

"THE LINE BETWEEN BEING FAITHFUL TO THE ORIGINALS AND PARODY CAN BE VERY THIN AND WE DON'T WANT TO CROSS IT"

ABBA The New Experience is one of the most successful projects and they performed dozens of times last year in venues all over Spain. The group has performed at major festivals, such as Pedralbes and El Mil·lenni, and has sold out some of the country's biggest stages, including the Palau de la Música Catalana. Two performances with great symbolic significance took place at events organised at the Swedish consulate in Barcelona and at the Swedish embassy in Madrid. The group does concerts to both standing and seated audiences, in more theatrical venues, and this adaptability allowed them to overcome the challenges the live music sector had to face during the pandemic. The band's current show is called Evolution, because "it implies a desire to take the show further in terms of sound and visuals," explains Argüelles, who adds that among the group's aspirations is to move into the international market.

A new year: ABBA The New Experience (left) began 2024 with concerts in Lleida, Sant Vicenç de Montalt, Badalona and Salt, while Momo (below) performed in Manresa and Igualada. / PROMOTIONAL IMAGES

Momo and Freddie

Another legendary pop group that inspires many tribute bands is Queen. Madrid's Momo Cortés says he does not try to imitate Freddie Mercury despite fronting one of the main Queen tribute bands in Spain, in a field in which there is plenty of competition from the likes of Holland's Queen Forever, Argentina's God Save the Queen, the UK's Majesty and Vipers Queen Tribute from Italy.

"I've always been a big fan of Queen," says Momo, a man with a solid musical background. "It all started 20 years ago during a night out in Madrid. In a place called Honky Tonk there was a piano and I began playing Queen songs. An agent saw me and suggested I put together a band," relates Momo, who points out that when they started working professionally with Queen's repertoire, they were "a rarity" on the Spanish scene.

In 2003, Momo was chosen to star in the musical 'Queen: We Will Rock You' and this allowed him to meet Brian May and Roger Taylor. He had "a very good connection" with May. "He liked my group, precisely because we didn't try to imitate them, and we got to work together on 'Tanto amor no es bueno', a version of Too Much Love Will Kill You. When we did the musical, May would show up by surprise and play with us on stage," recalls Momo, who remarks that in his band they have always "avoided dressing up and imitation". "What we do is a tribute, and anyway, Freddie's magic is inimitable." Momo, who often plays in Catalonia, also has a band that plays a variety of covers (Rockover) and he has his own project as a soloist with his own repertoire and three albums released so far. Between the three projects, he ends up doing between 40 and 50 concerts a year around Spain and he has even played in Bristol, at an international convention of Queen fans. "In our industry, tribute bands are criticised, but at the end of the day it's the public that has the last word."

"IF YOU WANT TO MAKE A LIVING IN CATALONIA FROM YOUR OWN MUSIC, THE ONLY POSSIBILITY IS TO HAVE HUGE SUCCESS"

A tribute a month

Both ABBA The New Experience and Momo have performed in La Mirona, in Salt, the main concert hall in the Girona region. "Our priority is to book groups who perform their own work but we can't ignore the demand for tribute bands because people want to listen to what they know," says the manager of La Mirona, Quim Marcé, who stresses that the quality of these groups is constantly rising. "You have to be a very good musician and really know the repertoire of the group you are honouring, and you need to be accurate because that's what the fans want," adds Marcé, who apart from ABBA The New Experience and Momo also references other tribute bands who have played at La Mirona, such as The Other Side (Pink Floyd) and Brothers in Band (Dire Straits). "I will never schedule a tribute group of an active band, such as Estopa, for example, who are still doing concerts. If I did that we would lose credibility as a venue," says Marcé, who has decided to programme a dozen tribute bands a year. The most recent tribute concerts at La Mirona were Me Cuesta Tanto Olvidarte (Mecano) and a homage to Pau Donés by the original members of Jarabe de Palo.

Facades to fall in love with

A new book brings together **148 examples of sgraffito art** that adorn buildings and palaces around Barcelona

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Sgraffito is one of the most original and elaborate decorative techniques used to beautify buildings by scratching ornamental designs on multiple layers of coloured plaster. There are some good examples of sgraffito art in Barcelona as the graphic designer Lluís Duran Sallent shows in the book 'Barcelona sgraffiada', published by the City Council, which highlights 148 of them. The book is ordered by neighbourhood, with a map and QR codes showing the location of each building.

The technique was born in 15th-century Florence and Italian plasterers who brought it to Catalonia in the 17th century. Yet it wasn't until the end of the 18th century that the main examples of sgraffito decor began to appear on the facades of grand buildings in Barcelona.

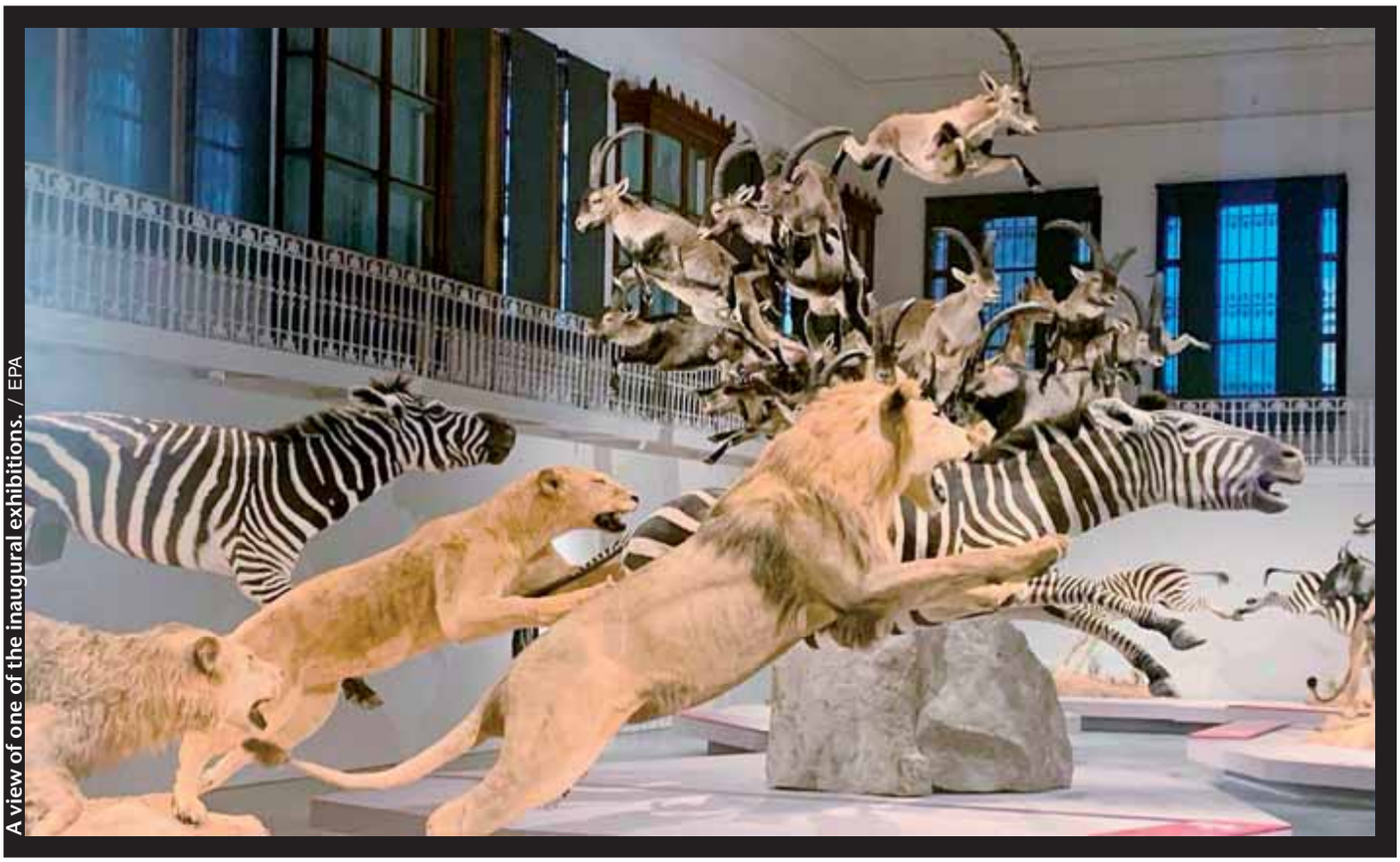
Baroque and Neoclassicism are the main artistic trends that used the technique, to decorate facades with designs of garlands, angels and mythological scenes. In the 19th century the technique fell out of fashion but emerged again with Modernism at the end of the century.

In the first decade of the 20th century, sgraffito and Modernism began to give way to Noucentism, with its more sober decoration. As contemporary architecture emerged, the use of decorative arts on buildings disappeared and the beauty of sgraffito decor with it.

The majority of sgraffito art still to be seen in Barcelona today was made during the Baroque and the modernist periods. Throughout the 18th century, Baroque sgraffito decor was based on motifs and compositions ranging from the Louis XIV style to Rococo, and it was often used to decorate the houses of wealthy merchants.

In the late 19th century, sgraffito decor was widely used in modernist architecture, and the technique sealed its place in artistic history after gaining attention in the 1888 Barcelona Universal Exposition and the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition.

Sgraffito art on buildings on C/ Balmes (Eixample), Av. Tibidabo (Sant Gervasi), Av. Diagonal (near Les Glòries) and C/ Josep Agulló (Sarrià) / LLUÍS DURAN



A view of one of the inaugural exhibitions. / EPA

The oldest museum returns

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The **Martorell Museum**, the oldest public museum in Barcelona and Catalonia, has been restored and reopened in Ciutadella Park

Barcelona's Ciutadella Park has recovered a key element of its heritage with the opening of the Martorell Exhibition Centre, in what used to be the Martorell Museum, the oldest public museum in Barcelona and Catalonia. The new venue combines modern exhibition facilities with historical elements from 1882 when the museum was first inaugurated.

The new centre consists of two exhibition spaces and a multipurpose room. It will offer scientific exhibitions on topics with a major social impact related to the climate and biodiversity crisis. The centre opened with two temporary exhibitions: Natura o cultura? Una visió des del museu de ciències naturals (Nature or culture? A view from the natural science museum) and WOW. Animals de museu: ciència, tècnica i art (WOW. Museum animals: science, technique and art), jointly produced with Granada's Parque de las Ciencias. The centre also has plans to work with nearby venues such as Barcelona Zoo and Pompeu Fabra University.

The WOW exhibition explores the work of taxidermists and includes six different animal scenes, such as a group of wild goats in full stampede, two zebras fighting, and a lioness hunting wildebeest. The other inaugural exhibition, Nature or culture?, provides a tour of the history of natural science museums and includes such highlights as the skeleton of Avi, the legendary elephant who lived in Barcelona Zoo at the beginning of the 20th century.

At the reopening last month, Barcelona mayor Jaume Collboni pointed out that the new Martorell Exhibition Centre joins the Hivernacle, the nearby historic glasshouse, as another restored building in the park dating back to the 1888 Barcelona Universal Exposition. The two buildings, he added, are also the first visible elements of the future Citadel of Knowledge, a scientific and urban planning project that aims to turn the park into a hub of knowledge, research and innovation.

The Citadel of Knowledge will also include the Castle of the Three Dragons, by modernist architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner, and the Umbracle glasshouse, both of which are set to be fully renovated by the end of 2026. Meanwhile, work has already begun on the three research buildings of the Mercat del Peix project and on the CSIC (Spanish National Research Council) Biosciences Centre, which is expected to be completed before the end of 2027.

The director of Barcelona's Museum of Natural Sciences, Carles Lalueza, explained that as a child he used to visit the Martorell Museum with his father. From its inauguration in 1882, the museum was open continuously until its closure in 2010. The neoclassical building was originally designed to house the natural science and archaeological collections that the naturalist Francesc Martorell i Peña had bequeathed to the city, before it was turned into the city's Geology Museum in 1924. The renovation of the listed building began in 2021, with a budget of 6.2 million euros. The final phase of the work will be the restoration of the facade, which is expected to be carried out in September.

The translation process (Part 1)

I met Mara Faye Lethem in the cafeteria of La Central bookshop in Barcelona's Raval. We sat on an unusually mild February day under the straggly lemon tree in the garden and talked to the background of pigeons' coarse chatter

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Mara is renowned as a translator from Catalan to English. At first, though, we discussed David Rosenthal (1945-1992). A New Yorker like Mara, Rosenthal was the 1980s oasis in the desert of translation from Catalan to English. He translated *Tirant lo Blanc*, *Solitud*, Perucho's *Les històries naturals* and *La plaça del Diamant*, among several other classics. His skill and push got them published in the United States, when no other Catalan books were available in English. Rosenthal was the pioneer and precursor of the recent mini-boom in Catalan-to-English translations. Mara tells me:

"I met his widow, who had deposited his papers in Barcelona's Universitat Autònoma. On comparing the three drafts of his translation of Víctor Català's *Solitud*, it was incredibly interesting to see how some words go back and forth. As a translator you really see your process reflected in that kind of palimpsest that has all these different versions." **

As well as translator, Mara is a student of translation. Thinking about the translation process drew her to Rosenthal's archives.

"I've embarked on a PhD on how I can use writers' archives to inform the translation of a deceased author, in this case Pere Calders. Since I work almost exclusively with contemporary authors, over time I've come up with a way of working whereby I ask them questions. Of course, with dead authors, that's not possible, but their archives do exist. It's made me more aware now of conserving my own process, not just typing over an earlier draft. The main research questions behind my thesis are how can I go beyond the text and how I can bring this into the voice that I'm creating for Calders in translating his stories."

I mutter that the PhD sounds an enormous, endless task. Mara responds with characteristic enthusiasm. Throughout our meeting, she both laughed a lot and often paused to find the right word: both enthusiastic and precise.

"Calders lived through almost the entire 20th century. With a thesis like this, I'm opening up doors I'm going to go through later. It's exciting. The whole history of 20th-century publishing in Catalonia is such an amazing story. The epic Catalan story of linguistic survival is very moving. And writers played a vital part."

I ask how she discovered Catalonia. Did she know anything about the country before coming?

"In hindsight, there were clues. In one of the missions in California, I found a tile in Catalan. Santa Barbara, I think. Of course, most of the Spanish missions there were founded by Catalans, such as Junipero Serra. And I remember, in Madrid 30 years ago I was told, don't go to Barcelona and cut yourself in the street because if you don't speak Catalan they won't give you a Band Aid. Not true, of course."

Mara laughs again, benevolently, and explains Catalan pride in the language.

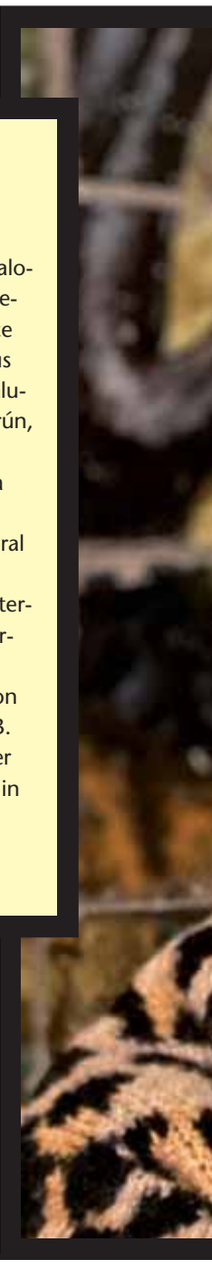
"The idea of language and identity being so entwined, these ideas are very foreign to an American. I don't even say I speak American, I would say I speak English… every country has linguistic policy, but they're just not all codified into law. In America, there are unspoken ideas about linguistic politics, but here you have to have your sign in Catalan. Even having a *política lingüística* ministry is mindblowing."

"THE WHOLE HISTORY OF 20TH-CENTURY PUBLISHING IN CATALONIA IS SUCH AN AMAZING STORY"

Tireless efforts

Mara Faye Lethem was born in Brooklyn in 1971. Moving to Catalonia in 2003, she lives now in Barcelona's Raval neighbourhood. Since 2007 she has translated numerous books: from Spanish, Pedro Zarraluki, Patricia de Souza, Jorge Semprún, David Trueba, her husband Javier Calvo…; and from Catalan, Marta Orriols, Alícia Kopf, Jaume Cabré, Irene Solà, Toni Sala, among several others.

She is author of the comic, maternal, murder novel A Person's a Person, No Matter How Small (Anti-BookClub, 2020). In 2022 she won Òmnium Cultural's prestigious J.B. Cendrós International Prize for her "tireless efforts over many years" in helping to make Catalan culture more international through her translations.

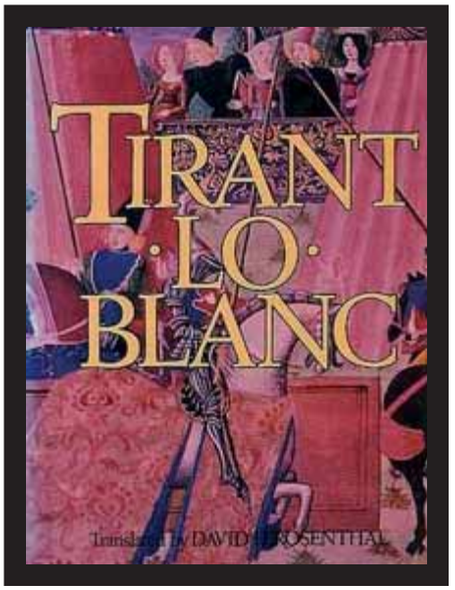


From Catalan to English American translator Mara Faye Lethem. Mara's translation of Joan Orpí by Max Besora (top). Catalan medieval classic, Tirant lo Blanc, translated by David Rosenthal (bottom) / ARCHIVE

Fidelity and Freedom

Mara translated Max Besora's surrealist, scatological and anti-imperialist (my adjectives) novel *Joan Orpí*. Besora is on record saying that, now standard Pompeu Fabra Catalan is established, he wanted not to be restricted by the standard, but to be fully freely inventive. I say: "It's such a linguistically complex novel, with invented pseudo-medieval dialogue, it must have been incredibly difficult to translate."

"I have two more of his books lined up. I've delivered one, *The Fake Muse (La musa fingida)*. This is even more challenging because basically it has no punctuation. I never realised how much I loved punctuation until I found myself bereft of it. In *Joan Orpí*, I felt I could



draw on many experiences. Partly, it's set in the Americas, so there's Spanglish that I could use – or invent. Also, one of my first jobs out of college was with a 16th-century historian, who was the world expert on Bartolomé de las Casas. So I had some exposure to a lot of what Max talks about. When I tried to get together with Max, he didn't have a lot of answers, he just encouraged me to take it and run…"

"Because he wasn't prepared to spend the time or just saw the translation as an autonomous book?"

"I think he thinks of his writing as a space of freedom. Some authors have very specific language and when you ask them something they have very specific answers, which is great, but Max would explain: 'Oh it was that song, you know that song?' Well, I might know some Radio Futura song, but the English-language reader's not going to. Max encouraged me to make the text my own, which is not what I usually think of as my job. You know, I'm trying to convey the author's intention as closely as I can, not just riff on it and make my own--"

I interrupt -- "So you're saying you're more attuned to fidelity than liberty, but Besora gave you liberty. The book becomes partly the translator's work as well."

"It always kind of is because you have to rewrite the whole thing. Translating Max Basora's probably changed a bit what I think my task is. If you read the contract you're signing, legally you're committed to staying very close to the original. And I find that the closer I stick to the original, in the beginning at least, the more I'm able to understand the author's style and intention. There are things I do of course without even thinking, move clauses around for example or change dialogue to make it sound right in English. But I think there's a kind of danger there. One of the conclusions I've come to, you rarely see a translator return to something closer to the original. As in Rosenthal's translations, the drafts move further and further from the original. They rarely go in the other direction, get closer."

** Mara's article on David Rosenthal's translation drafts can be found at https://hopscotchtranslation.com/tag/translation-history/

To be continued next month, on Mara's translations of Irene Solà.

The WhatsApp logo. HAYOUNG JEON / EFE

Fifteen years of global connection

Uniting more than two billion people around the world, **WhatsApp now faces challenges over privacy and growing competition**

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Exactly fifteen years ago, the communication landscape underwent a radical change with the birth of WhatsApp. What started as a simple texting solution has grown into a ubiquitous force uniting more than two billion people around the world.

The genesis of WhatsApp dates back to 2009, when, frustrated by the limitations of messaging apps at the time, former Yahoo employees Jan Koum and Brian Acton created a more effective and free alternative.

Although the company was founded in the US, few know that the development of the application took place in Kyiv, where Koum, a Ukrainian immigrant, had friends and family who could help program it. It is currently headquartered in Mountain View (California), has offices around the world, and is available in more than 60 languages,.

While it may seem paradoxical, WhatsApp is not as popular in the US as it is in other parts of the world. Apple's messaging service, iMessage, has historically been preferred by iPhone users, which has meant that WhatsApp does not have the same penetration in the US market as in other regions.

The company has managed to expand significantly in other parts of the world, however, such as Europe, where the app has become the main form of communication for millions of people. In Latin America it also plays a crucial role in the daily lives of its inhabitants, given that the iPhone is less dominant in that market.

Over the years, WhatsApp has undergone an impressive expansion. It has incorporated a wide range of features that go beyond simple text messaging. Voice and video calls, time statuses, voice messages, GIFs and stickers have enriched the user experience and have made WhatsApp an indispensable tool for personal and professional communication.

60
languages – including Catalan – are available to WhatsApp users

However, the path of the California-based company has not been without challenges. Facebook's acquisition of WhatsApp in 2014 raised concerns about the privacy of user data and its use for advertising purposes. These concerns intensified in 2018, when it was revealed that WhatsApp had shared data with Facebook without the explicit consent of users, which generated criticism and law suits. In addition, it has had to face the problem of misinformation and fake news, which spreads quickly through the platform. In 2018, rumours of child abductions in India led to panic and several lynchings of innocent people, including men and women who were falsely accused of being kidnappers. In response to this tragedy, WhatsApp implemented measures to limit the spread of viral messages, among others. Recent research at the University of Glasgow suggests that engaging in focus groups with strangers poses the greatest danger to users.

In pure business terms, one of the great challenges facing the company is competition from other messaging applications such as Telegram, Signal or iMessage, which offer similar or even more advanced features, such as end-to-end cryptography by default, more comprehensive group management and integration with other services. In addition, the dominant use of WhatsApp in some countries has raised concerns about market monopolisation and limiting innovation.

Even so, WhatsApp's legacy is undeniable. It has created a global communication network that has transformed the way we relate and communicate. In Koum's words, WhatsApp aspires to be "the best way to communicate with the people you care about most". And judging by its impact on modern society, it seems to be fulfilling that mission.

David Garcia, executive director of MODACC. ORIOL DURAN

DAVID GARCIA

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CATALAN FASHION CLUSTER (MODACC)

"Fashion will be as regulated as pharmaceuticals"

ANNA PINTER
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A recent report on the fashion industry warned that it is moving towards greater polarisation: either very cheap or very expensive products. How are fashion companies in Catalonia, which are mainly medium-sized, experiencing the current trends?

The Catalan sector is made up of 2,800 companies, with a turnover of 15 billion euros and employing 70,000 professionals. Although we have large brands and large firms, the majority are medium-sized companies and if they only make cheap products it will be very difficult for them, because there will always be another company that can offer them at a lower price. That's why we recommend they generate intangibles with regard to creativity, sustainability and differential value, because consumers are increasingly looking for innovative elements and new stories in fashion.

The sector is undergoing two historical and intense processes of transformation, technological and regulatory. What do they consist of?

From January 2025 the waste law will be applied, then we will have the ecodesign directive and other regulatory obligations. And, in addition, as happened in the packaging sector, fashion producers and distributors will have to bear the cost of collecting and managing textile waste. A second-hand product market will then doubtless emerge in Europe, because 80% of textile waste now ends up in a waste container. Together with the Catalan Waste Agency and brands such as Mango, Simorra, System Action and Sita Murt, among others, we at the Catalan Fashion Cluster have launched a project to collect clothes in-store to reuse, resell or generate new fibres and materials. There is already a Catalan company that makes new yarns and new garments from textile waste.

Do you think that with these new regulations fashion companies will substantially reduce production?

Probably, because it also won't be possible to destroy the excess stock, as we do now, nor will it be possible to export textile waste outside the EU. In fact, large operators are making a tremendous effort in stock management. On the other hand, the ecodesign that I talked about will also end up influencing production, because it will force the absolute traceability of products to incorporate the CO2 footprint or durability on the label of any textile product sold in the EU.

With all this increase in regulation, do you think we will end up seeing protests by the European textile sector?

Yes, just yesterday, at a Cluster event there were companies saying that if this avalanche of regulations is not managed well, we will have to mobilise like the agricultural sector. The proposed regulatory process is so intense that we'll end up becoming a regulated economic activity like the food or pharmaceutical sectors.

The agricultural sector criticises the fact that requirements for imported products are more lax. Do you fear the same will happen to you?

Well, so that it does not happen the EU has to do more inspections at customs and also directly in the marketplace and be in a position to review what comes in. If there aren't enough inspections we'll find that European producers will be complying with the regulations and what arrives from online sales platforms like Shein will end up not complying with any of these obligations.

Speaking of Shein, the online fashion platform that only produces if AI predicts the garment will be in demand. Do you think the industry is moving towards this model?

Shein, which is often seen as the devil, has taught us a lesson in how to reach the consumer with a fully digital approach, making them competitive and efficient. There is another case, too, and that's the second-hand clothing platform, Vinted, which has become the third-ranked fashion product seller in Europe. Through technology it has managed to ensure that its users are also its shop assistants and photographers and, in addition, that their wardrobes are its logistics warehouses. This shows how digital tools have transformed the rules of the game. Everything that represents the creation process predicting demand is revolutionising the industry.

Joan Cristina and Elisabet Zaragoza. / COURTESY OF ECOGOTS

No public aid

Ecogots was denied a subsidy they requested from the Waste Agency of Catalonia (ARC) to pay for part of the project to expand the range of products to lunch boxes, bowls and other containers. So far, the Ecogots range is limited to cups of different sizes, but they have always seen business opportunities in packaging for other foods also made from Oryzite. The aid they requested was for the moulds, which is the highest cost in this type of innovation. "We never received any public aid, which is mainly given to large companies for very questionable innovations," Cristina points out.

Sips committed to the territory and environment

FRANCESC MUÑOZ DORADO
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Sales of **Ecogots' Oryzite cups**, a material made from rice husks, are skyrocketing

Taking a sip from a recipient made by the Catalan company Ecogots takes us on a trip around the country: the starting point is the Ebre Delta, where rice is grown, and whose husks – a waste product previously incinerated – is transformed into a malleable raw material that is injected into moulds in plants in Centelles (Osona) and l'Ametlla (Vallès Oriental). These moulds make the recipients, which then travel to Cubelles (Garraf) to be personalised, before ending up at the customer's home. A coming and going through Catalan geography, which is completed by Ripoll, where Joan Cristina, co-founder of Ecogots, was born, and Olot, where the idea arose. It is therefore not an exaggeration to say that it is a truly Catalan product. "Nothing comes from outside," Cristina says.

One sip can also make us empathise with its creator. Ecogots is the story of a personal commitment to eliminate single-use plastic, which began 35 years ago, when Joan, ignoring everyone who called him crazy, manufactured the first reusable plastic cup for major festivals in Olot, Banyoles, Girona Sant Narcís... It was a success: at that time, city councils largely solved the environmental and cleaning problem that accompanied popular celebrations by charging for recipients. However, the final destination of the returned plastic cups would be a landfill, and Cristina was not satisfied with that.

He began a search that ended when he met businessman Iban Ganduxé (Granollers) around 2008, "another madman like me", he says playfully. The head of the company Algan Composites was working with the Montsià Rice Chamber to find a solution for rice waste. Until then, only 10% of the husk was used as fertiliser for the fields; the rest was destroyed by burning. After years of research, they obtained Oryzite, a material made from 60% rice husk and 40% polymers. Ecogots' own raw material, Oryzite, now has a worldwide patent and is used as an alternative to plastic in countless applications in the automotive, health, logistics, textile and furniture sectors.

Cristina had found the material he was looking for and Ecogots was born in 2020. But when the product was ready for market, the pandemic forced the launch to be postponed. "The positive about lockdown is that we were able to dedicate time to improving the product and marketing," explains company co-founder, Elisabet Zaragoza.

Currently Ecogots has 10 sizes and shapes designed to withstand more than 200 washes. In addition to being made from biomass, it is fully recyclable. In fact, the company facilitates the return of the container at the end of its life for its incorporation back into the production cycle as raw material for other cups. Ecogots produced 5.5 million cups last year, with a turnover of 2.5 million euros.

Food news

Text: L'Economic / Image: Proasis

Ice creams, cereals and chocolate that benefit the microbiota

The newly created company Being Foods develops **food products with added probiotic, prebiotic and protein**

Being Foods is a newly created company in Girona that aims to popularise functional food, i.e. food that incorporates biologically active components that provide health benefits. The company, with technological partner AB Biotics, has developed a line of food products that have added probiotics, prebiotics and protein that help protect the digestive system or that act as nutrients for the intestinal microbiota, that is, all of the microorganisms in the intestine that condition the immune system. For two years, Being Foods has been marketing five types of ice cream with these qualities, through large distribution centres in Spain and Belgium, and it will soon bring to the market a total of 21 foods (different types of chocolate, cereals, spreadable cheeses and yoghurts).

Since the Covid crisis, concerns about healthy eating have increased and Being Foods wanted to address this issue. "The value we bring is that our products have extra biological components that we should all have naturally and so we have become the spearhead of a new type of food that is a trend in other markets like the US," explains Fernando Calpe, CEO and partner of Being Foods. Under the commercial brand, Proasis, the company faces the major challenge of opening up a still little known market, with the initial help of a million-euro budget, and the economic help of the so-called 3Fs, that is, "family, friends, and fools".

WINE CELLAR

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Wine route through Pla de Bages

In the morning: Celler Grau i Grau (Maians, Barcelona)

Celler Grau i Grau is a small family business located in Pla de Bages, in a beautiful area amid mountain formations such as Montserrat and the Serra de Castelltallat, the Natural Park of Sant Llorenç del Munt and Obac and the Montcau massif. It is a place with a great tradition of wine-making that goes back to the 19th century, when wine production became one of the main economic activities in the area. The winery's story begins in 1885, when the family started cultivating vineyards and dedicated themselves to the world of viticulture. In 1966, Jaume Grau i Grau built the first and current wine cellar, where the first bottles were filled and stored. Since then, the business has not stopped growing, and in 1998 it received the major recognition of becoming part of the Pla de Bages Denomination of Origin (DO), the result of a job well done thanks to the constant and passionate work of the Grau family to get the best out of each grape harvest to produce the best wines possible.

Today, the fifth generation of the family continues to grow the business at all levels, drawing on their long tradition but also adopting fresh ideas with the aim of reaching people of all tastes. Celler Grau i Grau owns 20 hectares of vineyards, located at an altitude of about 600 metres between Anoia and Bages. The wines they produce reflect the different and varied expressions of the land and the people who cultivate it. The conditions of the soil and the climate make it possible to produce very fresh wines, which are gently concentrated and with good aging capacity. Their cultivation methods are ecological to show respect for the local natural environment. They winery grows the following grape varieties for their whites: Picapoll (native to Bages), Macabeu, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. As for the red varieties: Ull de Llebre, Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Merlot, Grenache and Sumoll.

Guided visits for groups and individuals.
www.cellergrauigrau.com
Tel: 938 356 002

For lunch: Las Vegas (Manresa)

At Restaurant Las Vegas they are specialists in bringing to the table the most select Mediterranean cuisine. The restaurant opened its doors in 1956 and since then has offered a cuisine with its own identity that combines tradition with new culinary trends. At Las Vegas you can enjoy a varied gastronomical offer to satisfy all palates, and at affordable prices. Every day there are different options, from stews and rice dishes to meat and fish specialities.
www.restaurantlavegas.com
Tel: 93 872 11 14

QUIZ

BARNEY GRIFFITHS contact@cataloniatoday.cat

Colloquial language

Here is a quiz to see whether you picked up on the meaning of some of the more colloquial phrases in Barney's column "Ripped off" on page 8 of this month's magazine.

1. The phrasal verb "to rip off" as in the title "Ripped off" and "these new laws forbidding them from ripping off tenants" means...
A. to annoy
B. to abuse
C. to cheat
D. to persecute

2. The noun "rant" as in "Time for a rant", which is also a verb, means...
A. shouting loudly about something for a long time
B. making a strong argument
C. criticising another person
D. telling the truth

3. The use of the preposition "up" in time-related phrases, as in "The five years on my flat rental contract are up", means...
A. approaching completion
B. too long
C. too short
D. completed

4. The phrase "to feel the heat" as in "anyone renting a flat these days is feeling the financial heat at least as much as any landlord" means...
A. to expect the worst
B. to be in a difficult situation
C. to look for solutions
D. to get angry about

5. The adjective "shady" as in "the requirement to sign a new contract seemed shady at best" means...
A. unacceptable
B. excessive
C. of doubtful honesty or legality
D. ill-advised

6. The use of "come" in time-related expressions, as in "come the end of my contract", means...
A. soon
B. when that time arrives
C. if that time arrives
D. after

7. The expression "to rake it in" as in "raking it in month after month" means...
A. to overcharge someone
B. to make money by dubious means
C. to make a lot of money due to much effort
D. to make a lot of money without much effort

Answers: 1.C, 2.A, 3.D, 4.B, 5.C, 6.B, 7.D

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BRITISH COUNCIL

LearnEnglish

Pre-reading task

You are going to read an article about how companies develop relationships with their customers, suppliers and other influential business partners. Before you read, think about where you work. Have you ever been to lunch with or received a gift from someone you have a business relationship with? How did it affect your relationship?

Corporate Entertainment

By Russell Evans

A

Companies are in the business of making money. To do this they must build and keep relationships with the people they work with. And one way to establish and develop connections with customers is to make them feel special. By treating your clients as VIPs, perhaps you can ensure that they don't find new suppliers for the goods and services you provide. When given the choice between a company which takes you out to a nice lunch and one which expects you to buy your own sandwiches, the choice for most is obvious. For this reason, it is common in the business world for organisations to have an entertainment budget for taking their clients out.

B

Corporate hospitality can take many forms. At one end of the range, some organisations produce key rings, pens or calendars which can be given as small gifts to the people they do business with. A step up from this is a lunch or dinner with a favoured customer in a good restaurant. The company hopes that by removing you from the office environment, spending a little cash on you and perhaps getting you a little drunk, it can agree a deal which might not be achievable in a more formal business setting. Towards the top end of the scale, many major sporting venues now offer 'corporate boxes' for the guests of the companies that pay for them. A VIP suite at the ground of a top English Premiership football team can cost as much as £5,000 per person per match. Corporate entertainment packages for the London Olympic Games in 2012 cost £55,000 for a group of ten people. There are many cheaper options, but whatever the budget, the emphasis is always on making the lucky customer feel special. Corporate boxes have the best views of the action, free drinks and world-class food, all in comfortable air-conditioned surroundings. And although the cost of these boxes varies with the sport and venue, one thing is certain: they are out of the reach of ordinary sports fans who just want to watch a tennis tournament or a game of football.

C

There is a popular saying that there is no such thing as a free lunch. This means that companies always expect something back when they give you a gift. So if an organisation gives you a 'free lunch', what exactly does it expect in return? Most corporations will tell you that company hospitality has been part of business culture for as long as people have been trading. They will say that taking clients out for the day is a form of face-to-face marketing which helps to make existing relationships stronger and build new ones. Others may claim that hospitality allows companies to reward loyal customers. These benefits are important, but is there an even more straightforward explanation? According to a website offering advice for new companies, the chief executive of one particular British plc says that his company has a simple formula. For each £1,000 the company spends on entertainment for clients, it wants an extra £5,000 in income from those customers. Another UK company in Information Technology says that when they spend £150,000 on hospitality, they want to see revenue increase by £1,000,000. And the managing director of a recruitment firm says the company wants a return on its expenditure of twenty times the cost for existing customers and ten times the cost for new clients. 'Free lunches' for customers, it seems, can cost five, ten or twenty times the value of the meals.

D

A free pen is not likely to influence a major business decision, but is that true for a visit to an expensive sporting event? When companies are spending thousands of pounds on you, they clearly expect something in return. Where is the dividing line between acceptable business practice and corruption? These questions can raise difficult questions for the business community and for governments. Recent laws in both the UK and USA have tried to separate hospitality and illegal activity. The UK government's advice is that hospitality is legal, so companies can continue to provide tickets to sporting events, take clients to dinner and offer gifts to clients if those things are reasonable and not excessive. Bribery, on the other hand, is not legal. If you spend too much on customers, you can get into trouble. If the entertainment encourages your clients to act improperly, or rewards them for having acted improperly, you may be acting illegally. And if you are trying to influence a decision-maker into doing something improper for you in return, such as award you a big contract, you may find yourself in court.

E

If you think the distinction between offering proper hospitality and seeking improper influence is not clear, you are not alone. There is a mismatch between what businesses traditionally do in their own interest, and what governments think they should be allowed to do. In these circumstances, the best advice is to be very cautious when offering or receiving hospitality. And the next time you are drinking free champagne on a luxury yacht as you watch the Grand Prix at the invitation of a company that wants your business, try not to let that affect any business decisions you make.

© Mat Wright

You should spend about 20 minutes on questions 1–14 below, which are based on the reading passage.

Questions 1–5

*This article has five paragraphs, labelled **A–E**. Choose the correct heading for each paragraph from the list of headings (**i–viii**) below. You do not need to use all the headings.*

List of headings

i. Be careful when giving or accepting gifts
ii. Difficult distinctions
iii. Five-star hotels and company yachts
iv. From a key ring to a week at Wimbledon
v. Hospitality and tax loopholes
vi. Keeping the customers happy
vii. Return on investment
viii. Unhappy clients are bad for business

1. Paragraph A Heading .....
2. Paragraph B Heading .....
3. Paragraph C Heading .....
4. Paragraph D Heading .....
5. Paragraph E Heading .....

Questions 6–10

*Complete the sentences below. Use **ONE WORD** from the text for each answer.*

6. Many companies include a hospitality ..... in their annual accounts which is intended to pay for all corporate entertainment.
7. Taking clients out for a meal can often result in a more favourable .... than might be reached in an office environment.
8. One of the claims of businesses is that corporate entertainment is a way of rewarding clients who are .....
9. According to the author, it can be difficult to decide if expenditure on gifts and hospitality is acceptable, or if it crosses the line into ....
10. UK law says that for gifts to be legal, it is essential that they are not excessive and are .....

Questions 11–14

*Are these statements **TRUE**, **FALSE** or **NOT GIVEN** according to the text?*

*Answer **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the text.*
*Answer **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the text.*
*Answer **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.*

11. Corporate entertainment has a long history in the world of commerce.
12. One leading UK firm expects a return of £15 for each £1 it spends on hospitality.
13. The financial rewards and influence which companies seek from hospitality raise some serious issues about right and wrong.
14. The author sees a clear distinction between what is legal and what is not.

ANSWERS

1. vi, 2. iv, 3. viii, 4. ii, 5. i, 6. budget, 7. deal, 8. loyal, 9. corruption/bribery, 10. reasonable, 11. YES, 12. NOT GIVEN, 13. YES, 14. NO

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HARPER'S WEEKLY, NEW YORK

"Cuba libre!"

Saturday, April 30th

1898

JOSEP BOSCH
www.josepbosch.net

Late in the 19th century, Spanish politicians both in government and in opposition, famously said that to make sure the colony of Cuba would remain forever part of the "sacred" Spanish territory, Spain would be ready to spend the last drop of blood of its soldiers and the last *peso* of its treasury. By the way, that was the blood of its working-class soldiers, since the children of the privileged classes could easily avoid the draft by paying a fee…

Nevertheless, when in 1895 a rebellion started in Cuba against Spanish colonial oppression, the Madrid government sent to the island one of its most prestigious and ruthless army commanders: General Valeriano Weyler, with a clear mandate: to keep the territory for Spain whatever the cost.

The task would not be easy, and the combination of the merciless tactics of the insurgents and the barbaric war methods of Weyler devastated the island and eventually led to the intervention of the United States, which needed peace in its neighbourhood for its commercial expansion and had long had its eyes on the adjoining territory.

The result was the short-lived Spanish-American War of 1898 that meant the end of the Spanish Empire – with the loss of not only Cuba but also Puerto Rico and the Philippines – and the growth of the US as a global power.

The appalling famine caused by Weyler's policies aimed at defeating the insurgency created a strong movement of sympathy for the Cubans among the American public, which was also stirred up by the sensationalist and often exaggerated accounts of the "yellow" press that was in the hands of the notorious newspaper barons William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer Pulitzer.

"THE SHORT-LIVED SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR OF 1898 LED TO THE END OF THE SPANISH EMPIRE AND THE LOSS OF CUBA"

That's why this influential political news-magazine, Harper's Weekly, celebrated the victory of the United States that Cuba was finally breaking its chains and gaining its long-cherished freedom.

A MATTER OF CHOICE?

THE LAST WORD
NEIL STOKES
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One of the best things about our society is that there is a real willingness to right historical wrongs, if necessary with proactive measures that would not be required in an ideal world but that can be justified by the urgency of the need to rectify an imbalance that may not only be unfairly holding back a certain group of people but perhaps even society as a whole. However, I suspect that at the same time this is also one of the worst things about our society. As the expression goes: "It's complicated!"

An example of this is to be found in this month's magazine. To coincide with International Women's Day on March 8, on pages 10 to 15 there is a series of articles and interviews that focus on the fact that, despite years of promotion and initiatives, women remain underrepresented in technical and scientific - known as STEM - subjects. In certain technical fields, such as computer science or telecommunications, females do not even make up 20% of degree students.

It seems there are multiple reasons for this and a number of hypotheses have been put forward to explain the deficit, from cultural pressures exerted on girls from an early age to young women being put off by the masculinised environments to be found in such subjects. I'll leave it to you to read the feature and make up your own mind.

A female scientist. / MANEL LLADÓ

Personally, I can't help wondering that it might just be the case that many girls and young women choose not to do these subjects. It is not that they are blocked or discouraged from doing these subjects so much as they simply don't fancy them and would prefer to invest their time, efforts and resources into alternative areas that they find more attractive.

To pick out two quotes from the experts consulted in the feature in this magazine, Josefina Antonijuan, vice-rector of social responsibility and equality at Catalonia's Polytechnic University, says "female underrepresentation is unfair and must be reversed", while educational researcher Mireia Usart says "it is very difficult to convince those [young women] who are not at all attracted to this [tech] world".

This made me think of my daughter, who is 19 and this year began studying fashion design. She has always been a creative person with a strong artistic bent who enjoys making things, and so her decision made a lot of sense. She says she loves the course and she spends a lot of her free time either drawing or on the sewing machine. She may be studying a subject traditionally associated with females but there is no suggestion that she was culturally pressured into it. Nor was she discouraged from choosing a more technical or scientific subject, rather those areas do not seem to interest her much and I have no doubt that she would be miserable if she was forced to do computer programming, for example.

It's not that there aren't women in STEM, and the numbers are rising all the time, albeit slowly. I wouldn't be surprised if at some point in the future parity between the genders in this area may be reached, it just might take longer than some people would like. Surely the key is not to force young women into these subjects but rather to clear the way for them to study whatever they like, whether scientific or not? The argument about the negative effects of cultural pressure on women, or men for that matter, can work both ways.

Listen to this podcast on:
www.cataloniatoday.cat/article/2391198

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